

ELL Student-Athletes' (ELLSA)  
Social Integration and NCAA Educational Practices  
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ELL Student-Athletes' (ELLSA)  
Social Integration and Educational Practices in the NCAA

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### Abstract

This study examined English Language Learner student-athletes (ELLSAs) from a Midwestern, Division I NCAA affiliated institution of higher learning. This study also aimed to better understand the ELLSA population, which is currently heavily under investigated. The cross-sectional survey included 41.6% of the population. After the survey, ethnographic interviews were conducted with three ELLSAs in order to begin building an understanding of the complex identities ELLSAs possess. The researcher distinguished various identities through this work and accounted for personal, academic, social, and athletic identifications. Additionally, information was gathered that pertained specifically to the various types of support groups within the ELLSAs' community of learners (teammates, coaches, tutors, academic advisors, university instructors, etc.). Some recommendations for bolstering support services include: hiring ELL-trained learner specialists, creating innovative means for responsible socialization into the greater campus community, and taking a critical look at how much time an ELLSA must spend on athletic training in a typical day. This study specifically underscores the necessity for on-going studies on the ELLSA population in order to develop a more student-centered approach and maintain the overall well-being of student-athletes.

*Keywords:* English Language Learner, student-athlete, international student, NCAA, English as a Second Language, ethnography

## Chapter I

### Introduction

English Language Learner Student-Athletes (henceforth, ELLSAs), though provided accommodation through English language tutoring, are an overlooked, underrepresented, and relatively under investigated population. I have been working with members of this population as an English Language Learner (ELL) tutor for the duration of my Master's coursework. I care deeply about ensuring the fair treatment of ELLs from a wide perspective and I would like to start additional conversations to provide advice on ethical educational practices. I would like to contribute towards the following in regards to ELL athletes: identifying barriers regarding student-athlete campus social integration; recommend educational programming and ELLSA communication strategies; recommend university and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) partnership strategies; and recommend student athlete evaluation mechanisms.

Without continued or even initial research from the NCAA and its affiliated member institutions, the extent of the issues within this population will remain relatively unknown. Moreover, the NCAA has few codified guidelines for ELL recruitment practices or formalized means of ensuring social integration on an institutional level. The non-existent nature of codified guidelines necessitates further study to ensure an informed decision making process. Continued research such as this needs to be conducted so that guidelines and support in favor of the personal, academic, and social interests of the ELLSAs can be protected. Due to the long history and an ever-growing trend of recruiting foreign student-athletes, the supporting community members of the ELLSAs should find this is particularly necessary. Throughout this extensive history, there has been little scholarly investigation regarding how to best educationally service the ELLSA population.

The purpose of this study is to review and assess academic, social, and institutional barriers, which possibly prevent ELLSAs from the ability to socially integrate themselves into the greater campus community. Both of those concerns, ELLSA academic performance and responsible social integration mechanisms, are central concerns that need to be studied. In order to do this, I conducted a cross-sectional survey and included follow up ethnographic interviews with three different ELLSAs. The data from two of these interviews can be used as longitudinal evidence in conjunction with a study one year prior. In this study, I also aimed to investigate the policies that impact ELLSAs. More specifically, I have attempted to understand and provide insight into the relationship between ELLSAs and the following groups: the institution's affiliated entity that provides English language services to international students, the institution itself, an institution's athletic department, ELLSAs' peer groups (other student-athletes & non-athletes), and/or the NCAA.

This thesis contributes to new thought and consideration into the experience of ELLSAs in Division I, NCAA regulated intercollegiate athletic programs and is intended to be beneficial for their personal, social, and academic livelihoods. Continued academic conversations such as this are important so that NCAA regulated athletics programs across the United States can improve, maintain, and ensure their records of ethical integrity. Many programs have already proven themselves leaders amongst collegiate athletic programs and this study hopes to further contribute to such positive leadership.

#### *Research Questions (henceforth, RQ)*

- 1) How important are speaking, listening, reading, writing, and overall English language skills to English Language Learner Student-Athletes (ELLSAs) while at their US university?  
Furthermore, how important is it for ELLSAs to earn a degree at their US university?

- 2) How often do ELLSAs socialize with people whose first language is English, people whose first language is not English, other student-athletes whose first language is English, other student-athletes whose first language is not English, and people who speak their first language?
- 3) Do ELLSAs feel supported by their coaches, tutors, academic advisors, university staff, and university instructors/professors?
- 4) Do ELLSAs have enough time to feel dedicated to their respective sports, socialize, study/learn, be alone, improve their English language skills, and be involved in student groups/clubs outside of Athletics?

### *Definitions of Terms*

These definitions and terms will be used throughout the duration of this study:

English Language Learner (ELL): people who speak English as anything other than their first language.

English Language Learner Student-Athlete (ELLSA): an enrolled collegiate student who participates in Division I, II, or III NCAA regulated intercollegiate athletics and whose self-reported first language is not English.

International Student-Athlete (ISA): an enrolled collegiate student who participates in Division I, II, or III NCAA regulated intercollegiate athletics and whose citizenship is of a country outside of the United States.

Progress-towards-Degree (PTD): "To be eligible to represent an institution in intercollegiate athletics competition, a student-athlete shall maintain satisfactory progress toward a



baccalaureate or equivalent degree at that institution as determined by the regulations of that institution” (NCAA Bylaw 14.4.1).

Student-Athlete (SA): A college student who participates in Division I, II, or III NCAA regulated intercollegiate athletics.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

#### *Lack of Literature and Brief History*

Despite the fact that research has been conducted on the greater student-athlete population, I found that there has been very little research specifically related to collegiate ELLSAs. People within this population would be defined as student-athletes who self-identifies their first language as one other than English. As intended, this definition allows for both international and US-domestic students to be considered in-group members. Due to the under investigated nature of this population, this review of the literature will provide insight into the more documented international student-athlete (ISA) population.

To begin describing ISA involvement in American collegiate athletics, D. B. Kissinger notes that “American colleges and universities have a long-standing affinity for utilizing talented foreign athletes to gain a competitive advantage” (2009). Kissinger goes on to describe this initial relationship, which began with Canadian athletes bolstering track and field rosters in the early 1900s. By Nels, Hums, & Greenwell’s account in *Do International Student-Athletes View the Purpose of Sport Differently than United States Student-Athletes at NCAA Division I Universities?* active ISA recruitment “has been occurring since the 1950s” (2009). Kissinger (2009) clarifies this discrepancy by describing the 1950s-1960s as a time of “vigorous pursuit of foreign athlete.”

Since the blossoming 1950s-1960s era of ISAs, the NCAA has consistently reported continued increases in hosting international student-athletes. Deeper insight into this population during these times is scarce due to a lack of official documentation and reporting to the academic community outside of college athletics. However, the 1990s finally brought about some of the

first in-depth insight into the ISA population. For example, the NCAA reported that “the total number of ISAs rose by approximately 2,000 between 1991-92 and 1995-1996” (*1996 NCAA Study of International Student-Athletes*). Of the total from the 1995-96 population count, 4,669 of them were international student-athletes in Division I schools. As can be seen in *Table 2.1*, there was also a disproportionate number of

female to male ISAs; though the percentages did see a 7.6% shift towards equal representation over the 5 year term of the study.

In 2011, Love & Kim wrote *Sport Migration and Collegiate Sport in the United States; A Typology of Migrant Athletes* and called attention to the “10,395 ‘non-resident aliens’ participating in Division-I athletics during the 2008-09 academic year.” The *1999-2000 - 2008-09 NCAA Student-Athlete*

**Table 2.1: 1996 NCAA Study of ISAs**

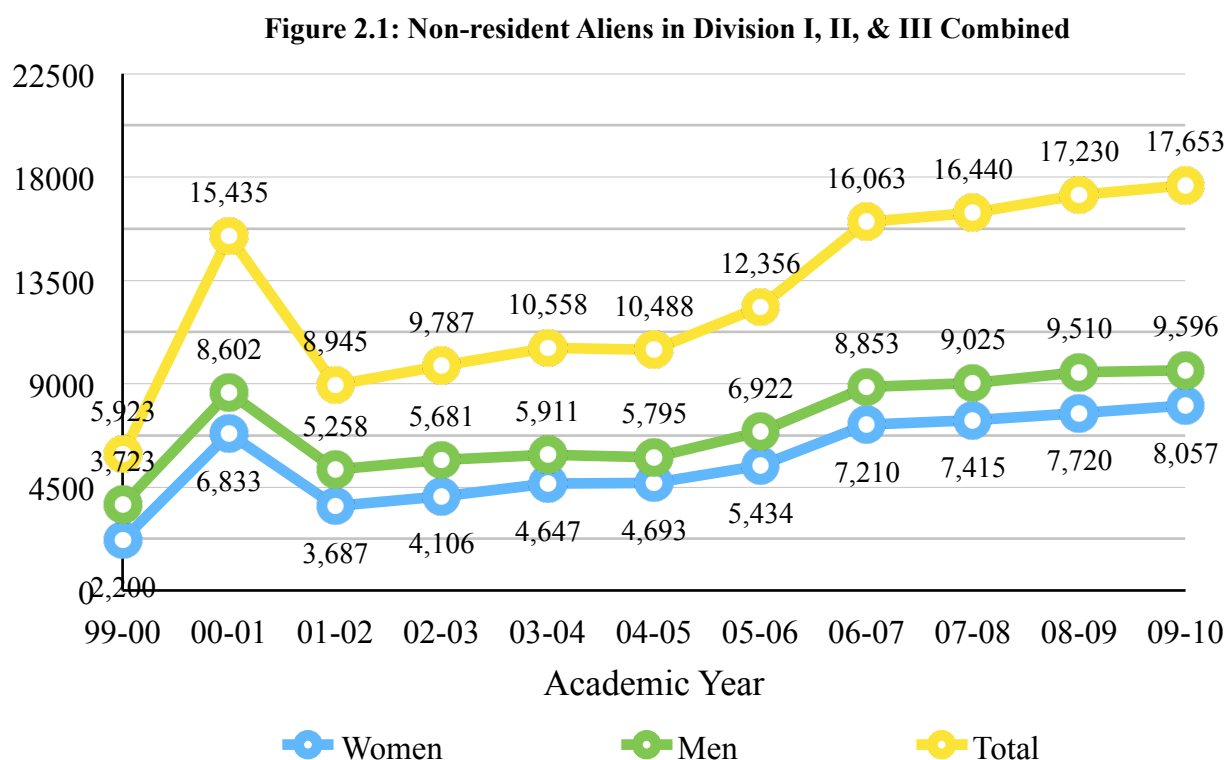
	1991-92	1995-96
NCAA-wide Information		
NCAA Total	6,833	8,851
% of Women	24.6	29.3
% of Men	75.4	70.7
Int’l S-A/School	8.55	10.52
Division I Information		
Division I Total	3,720	4,669
% of Women	27	34.6
% of Men	73	65.4
Int’l S-A/School	12.42	15.58

*Race/Ethnicity Report* Love & Kim referred to also indicates that “in previous reports foreign student-athletes could fall in any of the race and ethnicity categories (e.g., Black, White, or Asian) but for the purposes of this research they were only considered nonresident aliens.”

Furthermore and as stated in the report, “fluctuations in the data for nonresident aliens may represent a combination of changes in the actual number of student-athletes in [the non-resident] category, fluctuations in the accuracy of the data the NCAA received from its member

institutions, [and] a change in the data collection.” With the people from the ISA population placed into one category, insight into their needs can become oversimplified. In regards to ELLSAs, there are currently no reports, which provide insight into frequencies of self-reported or documented ELL designations. By not further studying subgroups within collegiate athletics, the NCAA and the hundreds of affiliated institutions face a barrier towards the promotion of a student-centered pedagogy.

With these notions in mind, *Figure 1.1* shows the total number of non-resident aliens between 1999 and 2010 as indicated by the NCAA’s 1999-2000 - 2009-2010 Ethnicity Report.



Unfortunately, these numbers, as interesting as they may be, are not directly representative of the ELLSA population. However, these numbers do provide insight into just how large the ELLSA population could be and are indirectly indicative of how under-investigated the ELLSA population currently in Division I, II, and III NCAA sports. This does not go to say that neither

the NCAA, nor individual athletics programs do not understand their institution's ISA populations and their needs. However, the lack of knowledge about the population on a greater scale is both worrisome and potentially problematic.

### *ELLSAs as International Students*

With an idea about the sheer number of ISAs who could very possibly be within the ELLSA population, I now turn the attention of this literature review to discuss the difficulties they face both as international students and as student-athletes. Since ELLSAs are a subculture within the student-athlete population, and the even greater international student population, inferring that they could also face some, if not many, of the same barriers as both international students and student-athletes would not be improbable. This interesting mix of subgroups and the explanation to come does not wish to imply that all ELLSAs will have the same experiences. Instead, the next two sections of the review are intended to raise awareness to all parties involved about potential aspects of the ELLSAs' multidimensional lives.

To begin, we must note that many ELLSAs are international students. As such, they must navigate their way through United States federal guidelines for visa requirements. They, as Kissinger (2009) states, "are subject to U.S. federal policies such as the Patriot Act and student visa requirements." These policies, and the difficult processes through which they must advance, are already more than enough to dissuade application. The NCAA's 2013-14 *International Standards: Guide to International Academic Standards for Athletics Eligibility* provides insight into the internal structure of the organization by offering criteria to help athletics representatives review initial eligibility of students who were educated outside of the United States. This guide mostly outlines what needs to be sent to the eligibility center and does not walk ISAs through the process of applying for a F-1 student visa. ELLSAs must register online with the NCAA

Eligibility Center, provide original official academic records in both their original languages and in English (via a certified translator), and have SAT or ACT scores sent directly from a designated testing agency. Regarding the latter requirement, the guide also specifically states that neither the Test of Standard Written English nor the Test of English as a Foreign Language can be submitted in place of an ACT or SAT score. With this in mind, there is no doubt that becoming a member of a NCAA team can be a costly endeavor.

Acting as a guide to international athletics hopefuls, the international standards guidebook also warns athletics administrators and admissions officers that ISAs “[should] under no circumstances [...] be issued a Form I-20 with the expectation of financial support from the athletics office before the student has been certified as a final qualifier by the Eligibility Center or is determined to be a partial qualifier in Division II.” The guide also stresses that both the athletics staff and the student-athletes should understand the potential consequences of losing eligibility. Most notably, the guide reminds all parties that a loss of eligibility “could result in severe economic hardship [and] possible deportation.” All parties involved must have an understanding of this reality. If they are not, both the given ISA and the individual institution could face severe consequences such as an unissued visa (i.e. the desired player cannot come) or even deportation.

Beyond the scope of federal and NCAA institutional regulations, international students have often been outlined as a vulnerable population in many different regards. Again, this section does not wish to imply by any means that all international students will experience the same difficulties and barriers. ELL international students will likely face the English language barrier in some shape or form (i.e. difficulty writing for an assignment or difficulty in communicating verbally in a given social setting). In *Literacy Skills Acquisition and Use: A Study of an English*

*Language Learner in a U.S. University Context*, Elizabeth Bifuh-Ambe describes a multitude of factors which can make learning in English for ELLs at the collegiate level difficult. These include: “(a) the student’s level of English language proficiency and prior educational experience, (b) the amount of background knowledge in related areas, (c) experience in the first language, and (d) the learner’s age” (2009). While the latter claim is currently heavily in dispute and is less relatable to this work, items A-C are less disputable and more applicable.

Claim A regarding the correlation between English language proficiency and academic success is highly logical. A student with higher English language proficiency and a richer educational background will certainly have a better chance at academic success than an ELL of lower English language proficiency and less educational background within an English oriented program.

An example of claim B can be seen through Chung Shing Chiang & Patricia Dunkel’s work. They indicated that the “Chinese EFL listeners [in their study] scored higher in their postlecture comprehension test when they listened to the familiar-topic lecture than when they listened to the unfamiliar-topic lecture” (1992). Any prior familiarity in a given content area can definitely be beneficial to any learner in a foreign language context.

Finally, claim C’s correlation is also not difficult to reinforce. Reese, Garnier, Gallimore, & Goldenberg concluded that “time spent on literacy activity in the native language [...] is not time lost with respect to English reading acquisition” (2000). Additionally, if a person is not able to speak and comprehend other speakers in their first language, then they will not be able to acquire and become proficient in listening and speaking in a second language by means of the definition of a second language.

In addition to academic adjustment, Sherry, Thomas & Chui described socially related forms of adjustment factors for international students. Sherry et al. noted that “international students in [their] study acknowledged the importance of language issues, understanding new cultural norms, financial problems, friendships and social support” (2010). Additionally, the respondents were practically spilt down the middle in regards to the question about having experienced some form of difficulty at their institution. These difficulties included homesickness, isolation and rejection of peers, a lack of job capabilities on-campus, and readily available ethnic food options on campus (Halal, Kosher, etc.). 35.5% of the respondents in the Sherry et al. (2010) study “indicated that they felt they were somewhat included or did not feel included at all.” With these notions in mind, few people should be doubtful of the potential difficulties international students may face at American collegiate institutions.

#### *ELLSAs as Student-Athletes*

With background information about international students in mind, this literature review also aims to take ELLSA’s classification as student-athletes into account. As a subgroup of student-athletes, ELLSAs will need to operate under the majority of the same regulations, time constraints, commitments, and potential barriers as any other student-athlete. First and foremost, student-athletes lead extremely busy, fast-paced, and highly structured lives. Their daily lives consist of rigorous workouts, classes, tutoring sessions, and, of course, the actual competitions where they can showcase their athletic abilities to the public. The life of a student-athlete is a balancing act that revolves around a tight schedule with little room for error.

In order to define the requirements to be a student-athlete, I will first provide insight into the policies regarding the student’s initial eligibility. The NCAA’s *2013-14 International Standards: Guide to International Academic Standards for Athletics Eligibility* provides athletics



administrators with a county-by-country guide that translates high school academic coursework of countries outside the United States to a U.S. scale. This provides information about the specific documents that should be provided by a given country's educational system, which documents qualify as a high school certificate of graduation, and which documents would classify a given ISA a collegiate level transfer student. The guide also states the following in regards to ISA initial eligibility: "Students who initially enroll full time in a collegiate institution [...] must present 16 core courses, a 2.300 or higher core-course [GPA] on a 4.000 (4 High) scale and a corresponding test [SAT or ACT] score to be eligible to compete at a Division I institution." These guidelines seem clearly defined and are updated from year to year when necessary. Additionally, the amount of research and thought put into this guide by the NCAA is certainly commendable.

The pressure to keep up with academics is immense and there are also rules about academic performance after a student-athlete's initial eligibility. These come in the form of recommendations by the NCAA and are enforced by the individual institutions. Specifically, a student-athlete must (1) maintain a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) and (2) be able to show Progress-towards-Degree (PTD) in order to remain eligible to play. Minimum GPA standards are vaguely outlined by the NCAA within their constitution and are written in the 2013-2014 NCAA Division I Manual. Article 2 Section 5 outlines *The Principal of Sound Academic Standards* and states the following: "The admission, academic standing and academic progress of student-athletes shall be consistent with the policies and standards adopted by the institution for the student body in general." As such and for clarification, individual athletics programs typically rely on their institution's standards of academic standing in this regard.

The second requirement, PTD, is more clearly outlined and somewhat easier to follow. Student-athletes must show academic progress by completing coursework towards their degree over the term of their athletics eligibility. In *Tough Choices for Athletes' Advisors*, Inside Higher Ed's Allie Grasgreen outlines PTD concisely and states that "athletes must adhere to the 40/60/80 rule, [which] requires athletes to complete 40 percent of their degree requirements by the end of their second year, 60 percent by the end of the third year, and so on" (2012). This can be a source of frustration for student-athletes and their academic advisors. An article in TIME magazine titled *The Myth of the Four-Year College Degree* highlights this difficulty on an even broader scale by noting that the Department of Education stated that "fewer than 40% of students who enter college each year graduate within four years" (2013). In understanding the overall difficulty of graduating at a rate similar to the 40/60/80 scale, one can also easily understand the additive difficulties and pressures student-athletes face.

In addition to the aforementioned institutional requirements, the NCAA has already codified the precedent they wish to set for the ensured well-being of all student-athletes. Article 2 Section 2 of the *2013-2014 NCAA Division I Manual* states the following: "Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational well-being of student-athletes." The 2013-2014 Division II and III manuals also echo this principal of student-athlete well-being. The NCAA Constitution written within this manual goes on further to address the overall educational experience of student-athletes and, in Section 2 Article 2.1, places the responsibility of "[maintaining] an environment in which a student-athlete's activities are conducted as an integral part of the student-athlete's educational experience" on the individual member institutions. Likewise, in *Office Of The President: On The Mark*, NCAA President Mark Emmert commented on the collegiate model of athletics stating the

following: “We must be student-centered in all that we do. [...] We have to remind ourselves that this is about young men and women we asked to come to our schools for a great educational experience.” Through both codified protections and promises made to the student-athletes from NCAA leadership, the goal of providing an excellent, safe environment for all student-athletes is clear.

Moving from the institutional requirements and protections, we can now turn to the extensive research that has been conducted regarding the lives of student-athletes. For example, in 2002, Clark & Parette summarized the accounts of many scholars and described some of the typical difficulties student-athletes experience. Some of these potential difficulties include the following: adjustment to competing demands, facing negative stereotypes, and obtaining the necessary support services in order to be successful in their endeavors at their institution. As described by Clark & Parette (2002), approaches that can assist student-athletes include: focusing on their transition into being a student-athlete, their overall educational experience, the various academic support types, personal and social support systems, peer collaboration opportunities, and leadership opportunities. With these approaches in mind, we can see that athletics programs across the United States have the potential to hold themselves accountable for much more than just revenue streams and championship rings.

Student-athletes do not have to face many of these aforementioned issues alone. However, they will probably have to face negative stereotypes from their collegiate peers and their university professors when bias or an uninformed voice decides to pull the student-athlete, or ‘dumb jock’ card. In *The Athlete Stigma in Higher Ed*, Bosworth, Fujita, Jensen, and Simons found, from a sample of 538 student-athletes, that “33% reported they were perceived negatively by professors and 59.1% by students” (2007). In order to reduce the athlete stigma, Bosworth et

al. concluded by suggesting that university administrators need to correct misinformation about student-athletes by providing adequate information to the campus community. Even if people across institutions of higher education are taking efforts to curb these attitudes and prejudices, we must remember that ELLSAs will potentially be facing the same treatment as their English first language speaking student-athlete counterparts.

The task of always staying on track academically while maintaining athletic excellence in a stigmatized environment certainly seems daunting and adjusting to this kind of lifestyle can be very difficult. Fortunately, student-athletes do not have to tackle all of their tasks by themselves. They have coaches, physical trainers, sport psychologists, academic counselors, tutors, and teammates who help them along the way. These people make up part of what Lynne T. Díaz-Rico calls a “community of learners” (2008). This part of a student-athlete’s community at the many NCAA collegiate institutions manifests itself into the athletic departments’ academic support services. These support services have been put in place to ensure that student-athletes can realize their full academic potential. For example, in my athletics program’s academic support services, student-athletes are provided with more than just content learning during their tutoring sessions. They also have tutors who can assist them with coursework for each one of their classes and help them understand how to use educational coping strategies (e.g. time management, study skills, etc.) to their advantage.

### *ELLSAs: A Hidden Population*

Student-athlete populations’ presence is well known across the nation. At my institution, student-athletes are even easily identifiable by means of the student-athlete tags on their backpacks or the athletics gear they wear. While student-athletes are certainly not viewed as a hidden population on the surface, ELLSAs have become part of a subculture within student-

athletes that is indisputably less visible. From an ethnographic perspective, these students can certainly be set apart from their student-athlete peers. The first degree of separation can be seen in that they are typically international students. Another layer of separation can be seen through either a self-reported or documented ELL identification. Understanding this ELL typology within the student-athlete population will certainly “advance our understanding of the important social relationships that exist [within the network]” (1999) of student-athletes. In 2009, Nels et al. also noted that “the increasing number of international students-athletes adds a welcome new dimension to NCAA sport.” With an ever-growing trend of recruiting ELLSAs into Division I programs, generally from countries outside of the United States, a necessity for ensuring their well-being from a researched perspective should be viewed as essential.

By addressing ELLSAs as the multidimensional people that they are, investigations can build an understanding about attitudes of people within this population. As ELLs, this incorporates their attitudes towards listening, speaking, reading and writing in English (RQ 1). As international students, understanding who they interact with in accordance to language groups could provide evidence for how integrated they have become throughout the campus community (RQ 2). Better understanding ELLSA attitudes towards the various key community members in their lives (RQ 3) could also provide insight into improving systemic and programmatic elements within their surroundings. Finally, developing a deeper understanding for what ELLSAs view as important in their lives (RQ 4) can help the NCAA and its member programs tailor their educational approach in a student-centered manner. Considering the reviewed literature, the research questions presented in this study have clearly not been investigated. All of these components will be sought after through the means outlined in the Methods section to follow.

### Chapter III

#### Methodology

##### *Acknowledgements*

First and foremost I would like to thank the ELLSAs who took part in the survey as well as the academic support staff who assisted me in contacting and working with the ELLSAs. Furthermore, without the students, I would like to recognize that there would be no NCAA, no collegiate sports, and college students at US institutions would have a much different collegiate experience. Additionally, without academic support staff, the NCAA would not possibly be able to ensure the academic success and ethical treatment of student-athletes. We are here for them and we are here to build a community of learners that promotes wellness of both mind and body. Moreover, none of us can or should ever have to carry through the tasks at hand alone.

##### *Institutional Population and Sample Size*

I gathered overall statistics regarding the ISA population at my institution by looking at all of the team rosters as listed on the institution's website. In total, there were thirty-one student-athletes whose home countries were listed as a country other than the United States. The country with the most student-athletes was Canada, with six of them from English-dominant provinces and one from the French-dominant providence of Quebec. France and Thailand make up the next largest groups with three student-athletes respectively. Next, there are two student-athletes each from Chile, Germany, and Russia. In the final category, with one student-athlete each, students come from the following countries: Australia, Cameroon, Colombia, Israel, Jamaica, Kenya, Latvia, Mexico, Paraguay, Poland, Slovenia, and Uzbekistan.

I was unable to gather surveys from all of the ISAs, so I cannot definitively state the language backgrounds of everyone. Additionally, I cannot definitely say that there are no

American ELLSAs within the population without conducting the survey on all student-athletes at my institution. For the purposes of this study, I will be making the assumption that twenty-four of the thirty-one ISAs speak a first language that is not English (see *Figure 3.1* for demographics by year in school). This assumption removes the six Canadians from English-dominant provinces as well as the Australian student-athlete from the population.

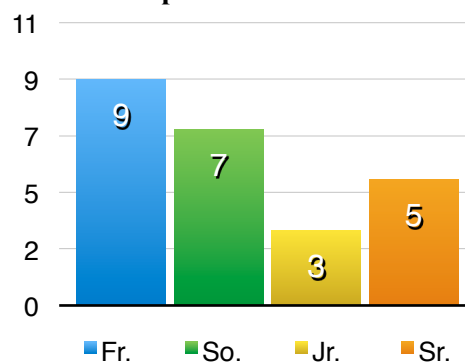
In regards to sport participation, there are a total of nine women's sports and six men's sports at this

institution. Of these teams representing the university there are ELLSA women participating in Golf, Rowing, Soccer, Swimming & Diving, Tennis, and Track & Field. ELLSA men in this population participate in Basketball, Golf, Track & Field, and Cross Country. The participants in Cross-Country also take part in Track & Field.

### *Surveys and Ethnographic Interviews*

Given both the under-investigated nature of ELLSAs and due to the connections I have made with ELLSAs through tutoring sessions for nearly two years, I found seeking out self-reported evidence from ELLSAs most pertinent. I knew that many of them enjoy sharing information about their cultural backgrounds and I wanted them to be able to tell me their own stories. This study is made up of two data collection components, which aimed to gauge ELLSA own attitudes towards English language skills, their desire and ability to socialize, and their attitudes towards their support systems. The sources for data collection included: a cross-sectional survey and ethnographic interviews (see APPENDIX A: Revised Survey Form & APPENDIX B: Ethnographic Interview Questions).

**Figure 3.1: Probable ELLSA Population**



The survey is comprised of five sections and was administered at the tutoring center. This provided a familiar, safe environment for the ELLSAs to fill out their survey in a relaxed manner. Additionally, I did not require them to come in during a certain time so as to provide a stress-reduced flexibility to their schedules. I informed the ELLSAs that the study aimed to improve the collegiate experience of both current and future ISAs. I also ensured them that their participation, or lack thereof, would not have an impact on their status as a student-athlete both within the realm of academia or their specific sports. Furthermore, I informed the ELLSAs that if they were to take part in the survey, the way in which they answered the questions would also not have an impact on their status as student-athletes in any regard. Researchers should always take the necessary measures to ensure that the ELLSAs do not feel pressured into taking the survey or answering in a specific way.

One of the learner specialists at the tutoring center notified participants about the chance to take part in the survey. In knowing quite a few of the possible participants, I was also able to remind some of the ELLSAs about the email sent by the learner services coordinator. No one was required to participate and all of them signed a consent form, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board. When writing the consent forms, I took the possibly of differing English language proficiency skill levels of the ELLSAs into consideration by simplifying and adjusting some of the language.

The first section of the survey items was open-ended enough to collect some basic demographic information. This information pertained to the student's age, sex, nationality, languages spoken (broken down into first, second, third, and forth languages), the length of time they have spent at the university, the length of time spent in other English language dominant countries, and their living arrangements (on/off campus and nationality/number of roommates).



Survey sections two through five were assessed based on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Section two begins with the following prompt: “While at your university, how important is it to...” This section is dedicated to discovering their self-reported attitudes towards speaking well, understanding other speakers well, reading well, writing well, improving their overall English language skills, and earning a degree while at their institution.

Survey section three aimed to understand with whom the ELLSAs socially interact according to language background. Options included the following: people whose first language is English, people whose first language is not English, student-athletes whose first language is English, student-athletes whose first language is not English, and people who speak their first language.

Survey section four inquired about the various support systems and their attitudes towards overall support by coaches, tutors, academic advisors, university staff, and university instructors/professors.

The final survey section intended to assess whether ELLSAs have enough time for the various facets of their daily lives. These aspects include feeling dedicated to their sport, socializing, studying/learning, alone time, improving English language skills, and being involved with student groups/organizations outside of their athletics program.

I conducted the ethnographic interviews after the surveys as a way to gauge which kinds of questions might yield the most interesting findings. Participants were chosen based first on a sample population I conducted ethnographic interviews with one year ago. Of those three ELLSAs from previous interviews, two were able to participate. These two have provided longitudinal ethnographic insight for this study. The third participant was chosen due to the relatively high number of Freshman ISAs compared to ISAs of other classes. The participation of

the third person also intended to provide insight into the thoughts of a more recently arrived ELLSA. Additionally, the three participants created pseudonyms, which will be used throughout the study.

## Chapter IV

### Findings & Results

#### *Demographic Information*

Of the twenty-four ELLSAs found within the student-athlete population, I was able to survey a total of ten, or 41.6% of the population. Demographic information was gathered from the survey. The ELLSAs in this survey had a mean age of 20.3 and consisted of a range of 18 to 22 years old. Eight of the respondents were female, while only two were male. This an excellent representation of the population in regards to sex as mentioned in the methods section, because 80% of this overall population are female and 20% are male.

Information regarding the time ELLSAs have spent in English-speaking countries and at their institution was also investigated. All but one of the participants recorded spending the same amount of time in the United States as at the university. The remaining ELLSA has been in the United States for 36 months, but has only been at the university for 11 months. The participants in the sample have spent an average of 19.4 months at the university and this statistic had a range of 6 to 37 months. Only two of the participants recorded having spent a significant amount of time in an English-dominant country. These countries included England, New Zealand, and Wales. Both of these ELLSAs were in an English-dominant country for a total of one month respectively.

The initial demographics section of the survey also investigated ELLSAs' living arrangements. Eight of the ten ELLSAs have only one roommate. The other two have three and five roommates respectively. Half of the ELLSAs in this study reported that they live with American roommates, while the other half lives with non-Americans. None of these

people are living with roommates who are from their same country. Nationality pairings include the following: French-Slovenian, Colombian-German, Slovenian-French, Russian-Thai, and Chilean-Colombian. Additionally, eight of the ten ELLSAs live on-campus and the other two live off-campus.

The demographics section also aimed to understand where students come from and which languages they can use. Table 4.1 shows the ELLSAs self-reported languages. Two of the participants are from France and the other eight are nationals of the following countries: Mexico, Colombia, Slovenia, Thailand, Russia,

**Table 4.1: ELLSA Self-Reported Languages**

L1	L2	L3	L4
Spanish (3); French (3)	English (8)	English, Portuguese (1)	Bassa (1)
Slovene (1), Thai (1), Russian (1), Kiswahili (1)	Latvian (1)	N/A	N/A

Kenya, Cameroon, and Chile. Spanish and French were most denoted as first languages, with three ELLSAs each reporting respectively. The first

languages of the remaining four participants are Slovene, Thai, Russian, and Kiswahili. Nine out of ten reported English as their second language, with one Russian first language speaker reporting Latvian as their second language and English as their third language. Two other ELLSAs reported possessing a third language. One ELLSA reported Portuguese and another reported Spanish. The latter ELLSA was also the only one to report a fourth language; namely, Bassa. This brings the overall total of languages spoken by people in the sample to ten.

Once the people within the ELLSA population were identified through taking the survey, I also gathered information pertaining to the sports in which they participate. The sample provided insight from athletes of many different sport backgrounds. Women's Golf, Rowing, Soccer, Swimming & Diving, and Tennis were represented, which only leaves female participants of Track & Field not reporting. Men's Basketball and Track & Field were

represented and Golf, with only one ELLSA, was the only men's team containing ELLSAs not represented.

*Importance of English Skills and Earning a Degree: RQ 1*

All participants in the survey deem improving their overall English language skills and earning a college degree very important. Across listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the ELLSAs found writing to be the most important. Nine marked this aspect very important and one denoted that writing is somewhat important. Listening skills came in second to writing with eight ELLSAs indicating listening as very important and two indicating listening as somewhat important. Speaking and reading both received eight responses indicating very important, one indicating somewhat important, and one participant indicating a neutral stance. *Table 4.2*

displays the information further

broken down into important, neutral, and unimportant.

*Socializing and Language*

*Backgrounds: RQ 2*

100% of the ELLSAs in this study reported that they socialize very often or often with people whose first

language is English. Six of the ELLSAs reported that they socialize very often with people whose first languages are not English. Under the same category, one was neutral, three responded *sometimes*, and none of them selected *rarely*.

**Table 4.2: Importance of English Skills & Earning a Degree**

	<b>Very/ Somewhat</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Not Very/ Not</b>
<b>Speaking</b>	80%	10%	0
<b>Listening</b>	80%	0	0
<b>Reading</b>	80%	10%	0
<b>Writing</b>	90%	0	0
<b>Overall Skill</b>	100%	0	0
<b>Degree</b>	100%	0	0

**Table 4.3: ELLSA Socialization by Language Contact**

<b>How often do you socializes with...</b>	<b><i>Very Often/ Often</i></b>	<b><i>Neutral</i></b>	<b><i>Sometimes/ Rarely</i></b>	<b><i>N/A</i></b>
<i>people whose first language is English?</i>	<b>10</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<i>people whose first language is not English?</i>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>
<i>student-athletes whose first language is English?</i>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<i>student-athletes whose first language is not English?</i>	<b>6</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-</b>
<i>people who speak your first language?</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

The participants were also asked how often they socialize with other student-athletes.

Eight reported that they socialize with student-athletes whose first language is English very often or often; two were neutral in this regard. Six of the ELLSAs reported that they very often or often socialize with student-athletes whose first language is not English. Two denoted that they sometimes or rarely socialize with student-athletes whose first language is not English, respectively.

The final part asked ELLSAs how often they socialize with people who speak their first language. This item elicited responses across the board. They responded as follows: two reported very often, one often, three were neutral, one reported sometimes, one rarely, and this does not apply to two of them. The two who responded very often are both L1 French speakers from France who have been at the university for six months. Their living arrangements indicate that they cannot possibly be living together as one reported that their roommate is an American and the other reported that their roommate is from Slovenia

#### *Support Groups: RQ 3*

Overall, none of the participants marked disagree or strongly disagree in feeling supported by coaches, tutors, academic advisors, university staff, or university instructors. As the

support groups mentioned here all provide services that are not comparable to each other, this interpretation of the survey will look at each group individually. Additionally, there were also three sets of two ELLSAs each from the same team. Commentary regarding these sets of people will be denoted as TS1 (Teammate Set One), TS2 (Teammate Set Two), and TS3

(Teammate Set Three) and can be found in both the coaches and academic advisor sections.

These two categories relate to support groups that will consist of the same people across people of the same team (i.e. teammates will have the same coaches and academic advisors, but not necessarily tutors or university instructors). Furthermore, the ELLSAs in TS1 are involved in a collectivistic sport and TS2 and TS3 participate in different, individualistic sports (Note: Total team points still count when in competition, which is somewhat different from some professional individualistic sports).

**Coaches.** Half of the participants responded that they overall strongly agree that they feel supported by their coaches. The remaining half reported that they agree to feeling supported by their coaches. TS1 both marked strongly agree with feeling supported, and TS2 agreed to feeling supported by their coaches. TS3 disagreed with one reporting strongly agree and the other reporting agree.

**Table 4.4: Teammate Set Results**

	TS1	TS2	TS3
<b>Coaches</b>	O	O	X
<b>Academic Advisors</b>	O	X	X
	O denotes agreement; X denotes disagreement		

**Tutors.** Nine of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that they feel supported by the tutors provided to them by the athletic program's tutoring program. Of those nine people, eight were on the side of strongly agreeing with feeling supported by tutors. The remaining ELLSA felt neutral towards their tutors.

**Academic Advisors.** All of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed to feeling supported by their academic advisors. Seven of the ten ELLSAs strongly agreed. TS1 came up with the same response by strongly agreeing. Both TS2 and TS3 came up with different answers.

**University Staff.** Seven out of ten reported that they strongly agree to feeling supported by university staff. One of the ELLSAs agreed and an additional two felt neutral in this regard.

**University Instructors/Professors.** This category provided the most diverse set of data within the support group section. Four ELLSAs reported that they strongly agree with feeling supported by their university instructors. Three reported that they agree and the remaining three ELLSAs were neutral in their stance regarding support from university instructors.

*Personal Assessment of Time Management: RQ 4*

**Dedication to Sport.** All ELLSAs strongly agreed or agreed with the fact that they have enough time to dedicate to their sport. Six of them strongly agreed in their ability to find sufficient time for their various sports and four agreed.

**Time to Socialize.** None of the ELLSAs strongly agreed with the notion that they have enough time to dedicate to their social lives. Half of them, however, selected agree. Three others were neutral and the remaining two disagreed in this regard.

**Time to Study/Learn.** Most ELLSAs reported that they have sufficient time to dedicate to their studies. Four strongly agreed and three others agreed in this regard. Another two were neutral and the remaining ELLSA did not agree that they have enough time to study/learn.

**Alone Time.** Most of the ELLSAs (six) responded neutrally to having enough time to be by themselves, but none strongly disagreed or even disagreed. Two participants strongly agreed to having adequate alone time and the remaining two agreed.



**Table 4.5: ELLSA Time Management Modes**

<b>I have enough time to...</b>	<b>Mode (%)</b>
<i>...feel dedicated to my sport.</i>	Strongly Agree (60%)
<i>...socialize.</i>	Agree (50%)
<i>...study/learn.</i>	Strongly Agree (40%)
<i>...be by myself.</i>	Neutral (60%)
<i>...improve my English language skills.</i>	Agree (50%)
<i>...be involved with student groups/clubs outside of Athletics.</i>	Disagree (50%)

**Time to Improve English Language**

**Skills.** None of the ELLSAs indicated that they strongly disagree or disagree with the idea of having enough time to improve their overall English language skills. One ELLSA was neutral in this regard. Four strongly agreed and the remaining five agreed that they have sufficient time to dedicate to improving their proficiency across listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

**Non-athletic Department Campus Involvement.** None of the ELLSAs strongly agreed or agreed that they have enough time to be involved with student groups and organizations outside of the athletic department context. Three felt a sense of neutrality in this regard, while five disagreed. There were also two ELLSAs who strongly disagreed that they are not able to interact with non-athletic department groups on-campus.

*Ethnographic Interview Interpretation*

I conducted the ethnographic interviews as a means to better understand the deeper meanings behind the results from the various sections in the cross-sectional survey. The questions were aimed at understanding what is important to ELLSAs in regards to English language skills and how to overcome language difficulties. The questions also place an emphasis on giving advice to other ELLSAs before entering a given NCAA athletics program, when they first get to their respective institution, as well as some advice pertaining to on-going support during their stay. The interviews also aimed to discover why the ELLSAs decided to come here, their reasoning behind why earning a college degree is important to them, and the most difficult

tasks they have encountered during their time at their institution. I also made understanding which support groups are most important to them central to the line of questioning in the interviews. As in the survey, the interviews attempted to discover what is important to the ELLSAs in their daily lives and how they interact, or why they do not interact, with groups of people outside of athletics. Finally, the interviews sought out ways the ELLSAs think their athletics program could be changed to make their, and future ELLSAs', experiences better.

### *The Interviewees*

**Sophie** is a 19-year-old freshman and comes from France. She speaks two languages, with her L1 as French and her L2 as English. She has been at the university for six months and reported that she spent one

month in another English-dominant country (self-reported as Wales) outside of her time at the university. Sophie lives on-campus with three American roommates.

**Table 4.6: Ethnographic Interviewee Demographic Information**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sophie</b>	<b>Milena</b>	<b>Jaidee</b>
<b>Age/Year</b>	19/Freshman	21/Sophomore	22/Sophomore
<b>Nationality</b>	French	Colombian	Thai
<b>Languages</b>	French (L1); English (L2)	Spanish (L1); English (L2)	Thai (L1); English (L2)
<b>Living</b>	On-Campus	On-Campus	On-Campus
<b>Sport Type</b>	Collectivistic	Collectivistic	Individualistic

She plays a collectivistic sport, upon which two other ISAs play. Neither of them are from her country nor do they speak her first language. Both of these ISAs can also be classified as ELLSAs.

**Milena** is a 21-year-old sophomore and is from Colombia. She speaks two languages, with her L1 as Spanish and her L2 as English. She has been at the university for 37 months and reported that she spent a total of one month in two English-dominant countries (self-reported as New Zealand and England) outside of her time at the university. Milena lives on-campus with one

German roommate. She plays a collectivistic sport, upon which two other ISAs play. Neither of them are from her country nor do they speak her first language. Both of these ISAs can also be classified as ELLSAs

**Jaidee.** is a 22-year-old sophomore and comes from Thailand. She speaks two languages, with her L1 as Thai and her L2 as English. She has been at the university for 21 months and reported that she has not spent any time in another English-dominant country outside of her time at the university. Jaidee lives on-campus with one American roommate. She plays an individualistic sport, upon which two other ISAs play. Both of them are from her country and speak her first language.

*Qualitative Interview Interpretation by Question*

**English skills.** All three of the participants found all of the components across speaking, listening, reading, and writing to be important by marking very important on all in their surveys. However, speaking was the first English skill each of them addressed during the interviews. Sophie mentioned that “even if you understand what people say, if you can’t answer, that’s really hard”. Her focus seems to be on the ability to respond to the environment around her.

Milena related her idea of importance to her field of study; business. She recognizes that she will have to be leading groups of people and giving formal presentations in order to be successful in the business world.

Jaidee related the importance of speaking to the ability to communicate to other people as well. However, she also linked the idea of being able to speak to her ability to write. She noted, “once you can communicate with other people, you can [...] write it, like, just [how] you say it”. She continued to note that speaking does not always transfer to an academic style of writing, but reiterated speaking’s importance to writing.

Both Sophie and Jaidee held listening second highest on their list. Sophie stated “it’s also important to understand if you want to speak.” As she did not indicate any other English skill set after this, one can definitively understand the substantial importance she places on directly being able to interact with people. Jaidee echoes this emphasis on interacting with other people in saying “if you get the right idea, [...] you know, like, what they are talking about.” Jaidee clearly wants to be able to interact with other people through verbal communication.

Milena took a different approach to this question after noting speaking as most important. She indicated that “the reading part is one of the most important, because you have to *write* a lot.” In this way, she seemed to be hinting at the importance of being able to read literature to properly engage in the academic writing process in the mainstream college classroom. She also indicated that writing is also important if she needs to contact a professor outside of class or for when she is taking a test.

**Suggestions to other ELLs for improved English proficiency.** All of the ELLSAs reported that being around and interacting with people who speak English is important. For Sophie and Milena, the speakers can be English “native speakers” or “non-native English speakers.” Milena showed consistency from the first ethnographic interview I conducted with her one year ago (Personal Learning Experiences Interview). Her emphasis is on simply conversing and surrounding herself with anyone who is speaking English.

Jaidee provided some contrasting remarks and noted that speaking English with “the native language speaker helps a lot.” She believes that “native speakers” act as language models who must be followed in order to improve English language proficiency skills. As with Milena, Jaidee’s feelings towards language models have not changed from her *Personal Learning Experiences Interview* one year ago.

I found no other common threads amongst the participant's responses, but each provided additional insight into their beliefs about what could be of use to other people like them. Sophie focused on simply trying to speak and be understood. She briefly discussed that people who are not understood the first time should make an attempt to rephrase what they are trying to say. Milena wants other ELLs to not be afraid of making mistakes. She said that people can learn from their mistakes after they make them and that making mistakes is just part of the learning process. Jaidee stated that ELLs should read and watch movies with subtitles to help them through their difficulties. She even made the claim that this is how she was able to learn English.

**Advice to other ELLSAs.** I wanted ELLSAs to provide advice to others like them within three different time frames. I was most interested in advice for before they come to the United States, when they first arrive, and for the long-term. Both Milena and Jaidee indicated that ELLSA hopefuls should focus on some of the "English basics" such as general vocabulary and basic grammar.

Sophie said, "I would advise them to watch some TV shows in English [and to] just read in English [to] begin to get in touch with the language." She seemed to be placing her emphasis on getting used to the sound of an English environment and to getting in touch with the language through written means.

Milena suggested that ELLSAs should listen to music before coming. She said "that it helps a lot [...] to know the accents and how people pronounce words."

Jaidee suggested that the ELLSAs find ways to learn about the culture they will soon be entering. She wants others to think about how people hold conversations in their home country and how they might have to change their approach when talking with people in the United States.

When first arriving, coping tactics are different for the three participants. Milena and Jaidee both agreed that ELLSAs should be open to the idea of asking for help. Jaidee said, “you just need to be curious, you just need to ask, like, what’s that for? What does that mean? [...] If you don’t do that, [...] you won’t know, like, what the exact meanings mean.” Milena says, “The first couple of weeks, they’re so stressful.” She indicated that without asking questions, an ELLSA might feel lost in finding their classes and enrollment materials, going to class, and signing important documents.

Sophie indicated the importance of being around people who know how to get around and who can bridge any potential language barriers. She also states that ELLSAs should “never give up, because sometimes it’s hard, but things are going to be better with time.” For her, the ability to stick out those first weeks was important. She also recognized that ELLSAs should not think that they have to do everything required of them on their own.

Milena, possessing the laid-back attitude she possesses, wants to tell new arrivals “just to relax.” As mentioned earlier, she knows the first few weeks will be stressful, but she wants ELLSAs to have faith that they will eventually become comfortable in their daily routines.

Jaidee places yet another difference on how to cope with first arriving. She suggests that ELLSAs should “start making new friends” immediately. She wants newly arrived ELLSAs to know that they can build a support group if they really try right from the beginning.

Finally, the participants were asked about more long-term strategies. Sophie, in having only been here for six months was, understandably so, not sure. She said that her strategy will be to simply keep trying to become more proficient in English.

In Milena’s 37 months at the institution, she has developed a familiar routine. She said “after a year you know how everything works, so you’re familiar with what you have to do

before each semester.” Milena knows what she has to do despite the many semesterly duties she listed in the interview.

Jaidee came up with the same advice for the long-term as she had for when ELLSAs first arrive. She indicated that they should learn something new everyday. When I asked Jaidee to elaborate on what these new ‘things’ were, she stated that ELLSAs should make attempts to learn both new words as well as new aspects about the culture and traditions surrounding them. Jaidee also wants ELLSAs to keep asking questions and continue finding ways to make new friends in different places. For her, being socially involved throughout the campus community is very important to her during her time here. Jaidee hopes that others like her will also be able to do the same.

**Goals and aspirations.** All three of the ELLSAs reported earning a degree as an important part of being at the university. Despite this commonality, they all took different angles in their line of reasoning. Sophie’s line of thinking placed the importance of earning a degree on the same level as her other two big goals; winning a conference championship and discovering a new culture. For her, earning a degree in the United States also comes with the perk of being able to better speak two languages. She makes further comment in saying, “I think it’s always better to speak two languages. I think it’s going to be a good thing for me later when I’m going to be looking for work.” Sophie wants to work in international relations and clearly sees a reinforced English language background as beneficial in this endeavor.

Milena’s emphasis on earning a degree has changed throughout her time at the university. She indicated that, at first, she just came to the United States because Colombia doesn’t “have the same structure as here [where] you can combine college with sport.” She later recognized the fact that “as an athlete you know that you’re not going to be able to play the whole life, so

[getting] a degree” acts as a backup plan. Another one of Milena’s goals is to play professional soccer, but she also knows that she could become injured any day. “So, if you’re injured, you can’t play anymore, so what’s your second plan? [With a degree], I know that I’m for sure going to be able to work for someone, or make a company or whatever.”

Jaidee’s main focus on getting a degree is somewhat similar to Sophie’s, but hints more at the high regard in which US degrees are held back in Thailand. “It’s good to have a degree, like when you apply for jobs and stuff, and [you can] know when you talk to people and they ask you, like, where you graduated. You can tell them proudly that you graduated from the USA or I can speak English.” She also commented that the ability to come the United States for college is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Although I know, through tutoring sessions, that Jaidee wants to be successful in her sport now and in the future, she did not mention this in the interview.

**Biggest difficulties thus far.** I found that time management issues was the most common thread regarding the difficult tasks of these three ELLSAs. Milena’s response in this matter deals with university instructors who “don’t care if you’re an athlete.” She seemingly felt conflicted in this matter and directly stated, “I don’t want to miss class.” Her education is important, but she cannot get this education without fulfilling her duties, such as practice and travel, as a student-athlete. Last year, Milena had a close call with her NCAA regulated PTD requirements. She had been taking a full course load all along, but an institutional barrier got in her way. The first three levels of classes at the institution’s English language proficiency center, which grants international students access to mainstream university classes upon reaching the fourth of five levels, did not count towards her PTD. “I took a year and a half of English classes that didn’t have any credits, so I was behind a year of my PTD, so I had to make up two years in a year.” Milena, with hard work and the help of her support groups, ended up making up over 50 credit



hours that year. During that time, she was not able to travel with the team or play, which was also tough on her sport psyche.

Jaidee's difficulties with time management were along the same lines as Milena's, but without the threat of losing her eligibility. She indicated that managing time between school and sport is tough. Jaidee outlines the tasks at hand by noting that they "have to practice, wake up early, travel for tournaments, do homework, and it's kind of difficult when I miss school." She made further comment during the interview about the necessity of needing to keep up with everything and being thankful for the support groups provided to her by her teammates and the athletics program.

Sophie only vaguely mentioned time management as a main difficulty. She mostly focused on how difficult becoming socially integrated can be. "So far, being socially integrated, like making friends, and fit[ting] in at the beginning was very hard." Sophie has been able to overcome this for the most part and she attributes her success in this regard to becoming more confident in herself. She is talking to more people now and is feeling more and more integrated into her surrounding communities each day.

**Important support groups.** In this analysis, I do not intend to infer that the other sources of support are viewed as unimportant. I believe the lack of specifically reporting any additional groups in the interview is not indicative of feeling a lack of support. The results of the cross-sectional survey are a good reflection of this line of reasoning. All of the interviewees remarked that their tutors are one of the most important groups of people. Sophie says "the tutoring program is very helpful, because having school in English, when it's not your mother language, [is] very hard." Milena echoed this point and added that writing tutors were most helpful to compensate for "the English part, which is [her] weak point." Jaidee made remarks similar to

Sophie and Milena and said that “they’re the most important group of people, because I need to pass to be able to play golf, so I would say, like, they are the biggest part.” Jaidee also commented that because she misses so much class due to her travel schedule, the tutors have to teach a sizable part of the course content during tutoring sessions.

All of the interviewees also mentioned their teammates as an important support group as well. Sophie said they “[are] really nice with me because they always [try] to talk to me and to tell me what [is] going on and [make] me feel part of the team.” Milena also stated that her “teammates always help [her] with everything.” Jaidee also notes that her teammates are one of her biggest groups of friends. Both Sophie and Milena also mentioned that their teammates make up their closest circle of friends and comment on how helpful they are to them.

Sophie was the only one who specifically outlined coaches in her response. This response came second to her teammates. She feels as though “they always care about [her and] they just [want to do] whatever they can do to make [her] feel better.”

**School-Sport-Life balance.** All three of the interviewees responded differently to this section. An academic focus is really important to Sophie, but she said, “Sometimes I forget to have fun.” She said that she is going to try finding a better way to organize herself so that she can work more time for enjoying herself into her schedule. Upon further questioning regarding her feelings towards alone time, she indicated this to be of high importance to her. “I like just to, just be alone and like rest doing nothing, but it’s not really possible here because I have a roommate. We share a room, so, sometimes I just go out in the campus and I just listen to music and I just walk and I like that.” She went on to further explain that instances like these are rare.

Milena, in her more extensive time at the university, feels as though she has enough time to be social and to have time for herself. She said, “I’m around my team a lot of the time, so that,

like, has the social part.” Her time off is typically on the weekends when she can go out and have fun with her friends. She said that having developed the ability to manage her time as a student-athlete allows her to find time to socialize. She still has difficulties during midterms and finals, but she indicated that this is typical of all students.

Jaidee responded in a similar fashion to Milena. She feels as though she has time to socialize and be by herself when she needs to be. However, she wanted to stress the fact that she sometimes does not have enough time to sleep. She said, “I’m going to be honest, because we have to work, we have to do homework, and we have to study, like, at night, and we have to work out early in the morning, so it’s kind of like, it’s kind of tiring.”

**Socialization outside of the athletics program.** One of my central causes for this study has been to understand how ELLSAs fit into, or do not fit into, the greater campus picture. When asked about her ability to interact with groups of people, such as student groups or organizations outside of athletics, Sophie directly stated, “No. I don’t have enough... I’m not involved with any student groups.” She seemed resigned in hearing herself say this and I asked her if she knew how to get involved or even if she knew what kinds of groups are out there. Sophie did not know how to get involved with any of the student groups outside of athletics, but she did indicate that if she knew how and had time, she would like to participate.

Milena also directly stated that she is not involved with any student organizations outside of the athletic department. She reverted back to the fact that student-athletes have very busy schedules. She continued explaining, “Like one more group? That would be, (sigh) I mean, so hard. [...] I read some of the clubs’ stuff and they require, like, so much time for the participants.” She elaborated and said that her inability to be “100% there” would not be fair to

the other participants of the club. In saying this, she seems to think that she would feel guilty due to what could be perceived as a lack of dedication.

Jaidee, unlike Sophie and Milena, directly affirmed that she is involved with other students outside of athletics. She said, “there is a great number of Thai people here, so we created, you know, an account in, um, conversation groups, like online, so we can keep up with each other and stuff.” She also stated that the group not only keeps up-to-date with the other Thai students, but that they also go shopping, have dinner, and speak Thai together. The latter seems very important to her, because she said, “it feels good to, to get to speak Thai again, like you know? It’s fun, to like talk to them.” Jaidee clearly shows how speaking her first language can be therapeutic to her and possibly other students like her.

**Improving the athletics program.** For the most part, these three ELLSAs feel satisfied with their athletics program. Sophie said that “the organization is pretty good.” She also noted that she thinks “everything is done for [them] to succeed in school, in [her sport], and in social life.” She also indicated that she has not heard anyone else make recommendations for possible points of improvement within the athletics department.

Jaidee followed suit in expressing that the athletics program is doing well in helping student-athletes succeed. She once again placed emphasis on the tutoring program. Jaidee also said that the tutoring program also currently helps student-athletes with their social lives. She said, “In tutoring, we sort of know a lot of people as well at the same time. We can make friends, too, like, with other sports, so it’s good.” Jaidee expanded her positive feelings towards the athletics department and stated that she would say, “[our school] has the best athletics department compared to other schools.” She mentioned that she has met other Thai golfers when traveling and said that “some of them have to find their own tutor and time.”

Milena also believes that the athletics program is doing a really good job in providing her resources to succeed academically and socially. When asked this question, she felt the need to speak on a broader scale, which related to all international students at the university. She said, “I know so many international students state that they don’t feel comfortable talking to people and participating in class.” She suggested something that helps all international students at the university to come together. Milena wants all international students to feel welcome and feel comfortable talking to people. She expressed the need for international students, even those who already feel comfortable, to continue to expand their social boundaries.

Milena’s understanding of the sizable international student population at the university is clear and she stated, “I know some of them, but maybe there is another, like, Colombian, or— I, I just suppose another Colombian or someone from South America who is here, but I have no idea.” This statement seemed to indicate that Milena might be missing something from home or that she may be wanting to find someone similar to her in order to feel even more at home. She concluded her answer with, “it would be helpful to know who is an international student, because we can help each other. Sometimes there is another international student walking around, but they don’t know where to go or what to do, so if we, like, [know about] each other, we can just take care of [each other].”

## Chapter V

### Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion

#### *Discussion*

In this section, I will first respond directly to the research questions mentioned in the introduction. After addressing the individual research questions, I will further discuss the ELLSAs as a population, ways for bolstering their supportive services, and provide suggestions and insight into the idea of responsible campus integration. Limitation-specific content, further suggestions, and concluding remarks will be addressed in the subsequent sections.

#### *Research Questions*

##### *1) How important are speaking, listening, reading, writing, and overall English*

*language skills to English Language Learner Student-Athletes (ELLSA) while at their US university? Furthermore, how important is it for ELLSAs to earn a degree at their US university?*

The results of the survey and the interpretation of the interviews send a mixed message about the importance ELLSAs place on speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The survey indicated that ELLSAs held writing and reading most important. This could have been due to the fact that they needed to both read and write in order to fill out the survey. In other words, they did not need to focus on using their speaking and listening skills and were focusing on the task in front of them. Conversely, the interviews seemed to point in the direction of speaking and listening as most important. Again, this could have been because of the necessity to focus on both their speaking and listening skills in order to participate in the interview. This leads me to believe that there may be a bias because of the method of data collection. A future study could ask the participants to rank these four skills to see which are most important to them.

Despite this potential shortfall, the data sets certainly showed that overall English language skills are very important to the ELLSAs. While this may seem fruitless on the surface, there are some definite implications for tutors. Before discussing how tutors can best assist ELLSAs, I must say that I wish the following scenarios did not have to be so blunt in regards to direct assignment completion. My colleagues and I are constantly looking for holistic approaches and methods that will best educate ELLSAs, and all student-athletes for that matter, for a well-rounded tutoring experience. Nonetheless, we must also recognize that looking at assignment completion as the main goal is imperative. As mentioned throughout this study, student-athletes have rigorous schedules and there is often little room for delay in assignment completion.

With these notions in mind and the notion of assisting students in ways beyond assignment completion at heart, tutors of ELLSAs must understand that they will be enrolled in coursework in one of three ways. Additionally, each of these three ways will require a different emphasis on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The first way relates to an ELLSA who is not yet allowed to enroll in mainstream coursework. If this is the case, then they will be enrolled in an English language center program that will eventually lead them to the ability to access mainstream classes at their institution. At my institution's English language learning center, there are three main categories: Listening and Speaking for Academic Purposes, Grammar for Comprehension, and Reading and Writing for Academic Purposes. By focusing on improving the skills required by the courses in which ELLSAs are enrolled, the most productive work can be done in order to lessen the chance of loss in eligibility and increase the potential for the student to succeed academically in their coursework.

The second scenario involves ELLSAs who are dually enrolled at an institution's given English language center in addition to mainstream courses. Once again, learning emphasis can be

placed on the requirements of the English language center's course description. Exiting the English language center program can be vital to maintaining PTD, which essentially correlates to maintained eligibility, and should probably be emphasized. While there is no doubt that the mainstream coursework is just as important when speaking in a broader academic sense, the English language center's coursework, for better or worse, should probably take precedence. If a student does not successfully complete the English language center's coursework in a timely fashion, the ELLSA could face loss of eligibility, loss of scholarship, and potentially deportation.

The third scenario relates to the ELLSA who has successfully completed all of the necessary coursework and is now fully integrated into the mainstream university classroom. Once here, a tutor can focus on tasks that lead to course assignment completion. This can be done by analyzing the course syllabus and studying (reviewing content)/ learning (educational interaction with previously unlearned content) accordingly. If the class mainly focuses on, for example, public speaking, then the tutoring session can place an emphasis on presentation (speaking) skills. There will naturally be a degree of reading and writing involved as well, but if grades are more dependent on the presentations, then speaking skills may be of more direct importance. Conversely, if a course syllabus focuses on writing papers, emphasis in tutoring sessions can be potentially placed on reading and writing over speaking and listening.

The final subquestion of this research question deals with ELLSAs' desires to earn their college degrees. While all of them marked strongly agree when asked if they would like to earn a degree while participating in the athletic program, the dataset from the survey does not tell the full story. I say this because two of the ten participants will not be returning in the following academic year. There are many reasons, as one can imagine, why some ELLSAs do stay at their institutions and complete their degrees. For the sake of protecting the participants' identities and



rationale behind leaving the institution, the following list is simply meant to outline potential reasons why some ELLSAs may not complete their degree: loss of eligibility due to poor academic performance (grades), loss of eligibility due to PTD (insufficient degree progress), personal reasons, and, probably the least common reason, going on to professional sports before completing a degree.

The diversity of reasons behind wanting to earn a degree, the fact that these reasons change over time, and the reasons for not succeeding in doing so should show all athletics programs that they need to be checking in with their ELLSAs on a regular basis in this regard. These students are not just here to win championships for a university. They are here to accelerate their lives in positive ways that will help them face the challenges of the real world. Athletic programs must provide continuous support to ELLSAs in the path towards earning their degrees.

*2) How often do ELLSAs socialize with people whose first language is English, people whose first language is not English, other student-athletes whose first language is English, other student-athletes whose first language is not English, and people who speak their first language?*

The results of the survey seem to indicate that ELLSAs definitely feel immersed, or potentially are able to immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment in their social lives. They all reported socializing with people who speak English as their first language. They also indicated that they socialize more with people who speak English as their first language than people who do not speak English as their first language. Furthermore, the results seem to indicate that they potentially socialize mostly with people who are on their respective teams. *Table 5.1* shows the make up of teams according to the number of non-ELLSAs and ELLSAs on a given team. These

numbers were gathered from my institutions outline team rosters. Men's Cross Country was left off because these students also participate on the Track & Field team.

**Table 5.1: ELLSA Population by Sport**

<b>Sport</b>	<b>non-ELLSAs</b>	<b>ELLSAs</b>	<b>% of ELLSAs per Team</b>
<b>M Basketball</b>	17	1	5.6
<b>M Golf</b>	10	1	9.1
<b>M Track &amp; Field</b>	52	3	5.5
<b>W Golf</b>	6	3	33.3
<b>W Rowing</b>	57	1	1.7
<b>W Soccer</b>	19	3	13.6
<b>W Swimming &amp; Diving</b>	22	4	15.4
<b>W Tennis</b>	6	5	45.5
<b>W Track &amp; Field</b>	44	3	6.4
<b>M = Men's/ W= Women's</b>			

The two ELLSAs who reported rarely socializing with student-athletes whose first language is not English are the only ELLSAs on their teams (Women's Rowing and Men's Basketball) and reside with Americans. On the opposite end of the spectrum, two students who reported socializing very often with student-athletes whose first language is not English are on teams with high percentages of ELLSAs (Women's Tennis and Women's Swimming & Diving) and reside with other ELLSAs of different language backgrounds.

With this in mind, further studies could investigate possible correlations pertaining to English proficiency development based on both team dynamics and living arrangements. This could possibly provide the athletics program with insight in how to best match up roommate situations for the students who choose to or receive a scholarship to live in on-campus housing.

I would speculate that living with another ELLSA and living with a student-athlete whose first language is English could both be beneficial. I believe that the former could provide emotional support, as many of my students have stated the importance of knowing other ELLSAs due to the fact that they can relate on many different levels based on their backgrounds as international students and as student-athletes. The latter could be beneficial for both the potential to meet more domestic students and for the purposes of developing a deeper understanding of the culture and the language within their environment.

*3) Do ELLSAs feel supported by their coaches, tutors, academic advisors, university staff, and university instructors/professors?*

The ELLSAs in this study appear to feel overwhelmingly supported by their coaches, tutors, and academic advisors. Further studies could be conducted that delve deeper into both why and how they feel supported by these groups. A study such as this could propose suggestions to help the students feel and be even more supported by both the sport and academic units within their athletic program.

The ethnographic interviews provided even more in-depth insight into the support groups ELLSAs value. They seemed to more strongly indicate that the tutors play one of the most important roles in their ability to succeed. This might be due to the fact that they have more face-to-face interaction time with tutors than, for example, their academic advisors, who complete the bulk of their work assisting the ELLSAs in a more behind-the-scenes fashion. Additionally, the ELLSAs in the ethnographic interviews made more references to tutors than to coaches, which I believe shows that ELLSAs understand that without succeeding academically, they may risk losing the benefits that come with their eligibility such as playing on a team, having access to great coaches, and obtaining assistance from physical trainers.

The results from the survey regarding feelings of support from university instructors and professors was much more positive than the examples provided in the review of the literature. 70% of the ELLSAs in this study responded that they either strongly agree or agree to feeling supported. However, 30% of the ELLSAs in this study were neutral. Milena was one of these students and she reported during the ethnographic interview that some instructors do not care about their status or responsibilities as student-athletes. Further ethnographic study could also determine the rationale behind the other two students who marked neutral on this item.

While empathy is certainly not mandated by the university in regards to the busy lives of student-athletes, instructors should be more understanding of their students. They need to realize, and not just for ELLSAs, that they are educating a diverse group of people that may contain members who must operate under certain restrictions they cannot alter. Additionally, I do not wish to demand that all instructors take a specific approach to their teaching, as doing such would be both patronizing and the kind of authoritarian directive that hinders creative educational practice. Nonetheless, instructors should, if they wish to see their students succeed, become more familiar with the various demands placed upon the students who fill their classrooms and pay their salaries.

*4) Do ELLSAs have enough time to feel dedicated to their respective sports, socialize, study/learn, be alone, improve their English language skills, and be involved in student groups/clubs outside of Athletics?*

ELLSAs indicated that they definitely have time to feel dedicated to their sports. Their highly structured schedules incorporate athletic training both in the early morning hours and in the afternoon. Further studies could take an even more critical look at ELLSAs' schedules to see just how much time they must invest in their sport physically. Recommendations from such a

study could then be produced to possibly limit, reduce, or at least make potentially overly rigorous training schedules more bearable. This could also possibly free up some time for ELLSAs to become more socially included throughout the greater campus community.

Though most ELLSAs agreed that they have time to dedicate to their social life, none of them indicated that they strongly agreed with this statement. Sophie was amongst the two who disagreed with this statement and she indicated in the interview that her studies come first, but often conflict with her ability to socialize. She specifically said, “Sometimes I forget to have fun.” In hearing this, I automatically think of two possible ways to provide ELLSAs with the social life they so desire. The first involves potentially reducing training hours in order to provide them with more room for their personal lives. While coaches and trainers will likely reject this proposition, some of them may actually need this. The second proposal would be to find ways to bring different sports together for workouts so that they can at least meet other student-athletes from different sports. I know that the type of training required for each sport is definitely different, but there must be some common threads that can allow student-athletes to be brought together on more occasions while still being productive athletically.

On the academic side, many ELLSAs reported that they have enough time dedicated to the learning process. The fact that one ELLSA disagreed with this statement forces me as an educator to automatically raise a red flag. Athletics programs must constantly remind themselves that student-athletes need to be students before they are athletes; an argument is not only valid when conversations about player compensation arise. If any student-athlete is worried about the time they have to dedicate to their academic work, then conversations need to be initiated about how to best allow this student to succeed; lessening training time without sport participation penalty not left out of the possible solutions.

Returning to the argument that student-athletes are students first, I would like to further this sentiment. Although many people would suggest that this is implied, I believe that student-athletes are, in fact, not students first. Rather, they should be viewed first as people. As such, the NCAA and athletics programs should ensure that ELLSAs, and student-athletes in general, are allowed to have adequate time to themselves. The majority of people in the survey indicated that they are neutral to this question. I often wonder if this is due to the fact that they do not think about the concept of having alone time because of their rigorous, sometimes unforgiving schedules. Further studies could assess the importance of adequate alone time to mental healthiness and make suggestions about how to best address the potential issue of a lack thereof.

As international students who are not first language speakers of English, ELLSAs will also need time to improve their English language proficiency skills if they are to be successful in their academic and social endeavors. The majority of ELLSAs in this survey indicated that they have adequate time to improve these skills. There is no doubt about the fact that they receive direct instructional assistance from their tutors and university instructors. I would also argue that they are indirectly assisted in the language learning process by their coaches, academic advisors, peers, and their surrounding environment in general. The students who took part in the interviews all expressed the belief that interacting with people who are speaking English will be beneficial to attaining a higher level of language proficiency. The next step, which could be conducted in a further study, would be to figure out how to best create situations for ELLSAs to interact even more with the people surrounding them.

While ELLSAs reported their ability to feel dedicated to their sports and studies, the majority of them rejected the idea that they have adequate time to dedicate to social groups outside of athletics. In reviewing the literature, international students, let alone ISAs, already

have difficulties finding paths into social structures that mostly consist of (English L1) domestic students. While many of the ELLSAs interact with domestic student-athletes, I believe that they should also be able to interact with student groups and organizations that involve their interests outside of their sports. Allowing time for ELLSAs to become part of the greater campus community, in ways which are meaningful and beneficial to them, is imperative to their ability to develop into the people they wish to become. While ELLSAs will certainly be able to develop themselves through sport and academics in their current state, I honestly believe they should also be provided adequate time to work towards their own personal and social aspirations.

### *One Person, Many Hats*

The surveys and more importantly the ethnographic interviews are telling of the ELLSA experience. Their varying subgroups display the multitude of communities to which they belong and to which they self-identify. As collegiate students, the way they can most simply be perceived on the surface, ELLSAs want to be able to earn degrees and believe that doing so will promote their future job security. As students, ELLSAs possess and must develop time management skills to balance their academic and social lives; though they may not always succeed in finding a balance between the two all of the time. Difficulties in this regard are common amongst virtually any student population. As collegiate students, they are also in the process of discovering who they are and who they want to be. They want to interact with their peers and they want to expand their horizons socially. ELLSAs want to find places where they are accepted and where they can feel at home.

As international students at US institutions of higher learning, ELLSAs are unsure upon arrival about the workings and requirements of getting their first semester started. Fortunately, the issuance of their visa should mean that they should have housing, healthcare, and sufficient

funds to live off of secured before arrival. With this stated, they, as international students, are not necessarily well versed in how to navigate their new environment. The aforementioned resources provide the basic necessities to a secure life, but they do not cover all that is required for the ELLSAs to have a positive experience where they can learn and grow as people, students, and athletes. ELLSAs may need some additional guided direction to help them be successful from their time of arrival, because of their potential status as international students. These aspects are important for the duration of their stay, but they are also just the beginning. The individual people who come from different countries, religions, and sports cultures will more than likely need to be cared for and assisted in their development and adjustment to the university in a multitude of ways.

ELLSAs, like other international students, also want to improve their English language skills. They all come to the university with different backgrounds. These include, but are not limited to the school system of their country of origin, their prior knowledge of English, their previous experience actively engaging in an English environment, and the way in which they express their own personality. International students who come to the United States are much more diverse than the country indicated on their passports. ELLSAs also have difficulties similar to any other person attempting to learn and become proficient in a language different than their first language. They have silent periods before finally breaking through to interact with other students. They develop coping skills to aid their English language skill sets across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They want to understand the new environment around them and they want to be understood, without ridicule, by the people within their various circles. As international students, ELLSAs also want to succeed academically. They know the importance of reading for academic purposes and also want to become better writers.



Language proficiency and academic success are not the only difficult factors in international students' lives. They, on varying levels, also wish to find success on a social level. They want to interact with domestic and other international students. Some of them also want to find people from their own language background and home countries to, in a way, have a small piece of home away from home. Many of them may not know how to become involved in campus life and they will face barriers that domestic students, specifically traditional undergraduate students, may not so directly face. Some may become discouraged in their ability to 'fit in' and homesickness may unsettle their psyches from time to time. ELLSAs, as other international students, may become more grounded and overcome their difficulties with the help of the people with which they build connections and harmonious relationships.

For ELLSAs, these harmonious relationships are often built through another dynamic element of their being; namely, their status as student-athletes. Amidst all of the language learning, academic development, and social development, ELLSAs are also coming to the United States to develop themselves as athletes. They want to win championships just as their peers do. ELLSAs are also held to the same standards as other student-athletes on both academic and sporting levels. The pressure to preserve their status as a student-athlete, and often ultimately as an international student in the United States through PTD, is as evident if not even more evident than that of their peers due to the potential inability to take part in the mainstream classroom because of their level of English language proficiency.

With all of these intersecting identities, ELLSAs have many difficult tasks to overcome. Though they are not alone in their endeavors, their many support groups can only act as coaches. When it comes to game time in the sporting spotlight, in the classroom, or in their social lives, they must take control and execute the tasks at hand or else they may suffer temporary losses or

overall defeat. Not all ELLSAs, as not all university students, earn their degrees. Some of them have to return to their nations of origin and find another venue in life outside of the university context. I would agree that the majority of the people who have had to leave the university had a fair chance at success. Nevertheless, I would not explicitly state that they were either all provided truly student-centered means to promote their success, or that potential institutional barriers through US visa requirements, the NCAA, the affiliated universities, the affiliated English language centers for international students, or the specific athletics programs were absolutely just.

#### *Bolstered Support for ELLSAs and Athletic Programs*

Once we develop a deeper understanding of the ELLSA population, we will easily realize that more can certainly be done to ensure their well-being. Improving the support groups and developing the people within the various support groups for ELLSAs would definitely be a productive place to begin. This can be done in several different ways. Additionally, these suggestions, and the ones that are provided in subsequent subsections, are in no way intended to imply that they can be carried out in an effective manner by all universities as they currently stand or that they will work for all NCAA affiliated institutions and athletic programs. When considering the application of these suggestions, all stakeholders should be included in the conversation in order to develop and provide a realistic, student-centered approach.

If an institution has or is considering bringing ELLSAs into their program, the given athletics department should consider developing ELL-specific programming. This could be developed on the NCAA level, or could be developed by each institution. I would suggest a mixture of both, but the NCAA should not allow itself to create a blanket statement or requirements for all institutions that ultimately forces the individual institutions to

disproportionally expend their resources. Improving educational standards can be a costly endeavor and the leaders of the NCAA should feel compelled to assist all of their affiliated institutions to continue to strive for academic excellence. This is especially true if they wish to uphold their claims of being student-centered and focused on “[reminding themselves] that this is about [the] young men and women [they] asked to come to [their] schools for a great educational experience” (NCAA President, Mark Emmert).

There are many different methods and resources that can be implemented to improve the NCAA’s educational standards and the experience of ELLSAs. First and foremost, the NCAA should recognize the need for ELL learner specialist positions. These positions should be created at all institutions that wish to recruit and retain ELLSAs. This is especially true in the cases of institutions that heavily rely on international students to bolster their team rosters. If these students will be helping the athletics program achieve a higher level of greatness, then so too should the athletics programs be ensuring a sustained or even heightened level of academic support. ELLSAs deserve people who will understand and know how to react to ELLSA-specific concerns and issues. If properly trained and educated individuals are put into place, ELLSAs should be able to not only feel as though they are being cared for, they should also feel as though they are being provided a safe learning and social environment. Research-based ways and means are certainly a way to ensure and promote the level of care ELLSAs deserve.

With an increased presence of ELL educated individuals who can advocate on ELLSAs’ behalf, deeper conversations can be discussed between a given athletics program and the university. The first and personally most important aspect of the bigger picture that requires immediate attention, in my eyes, would be the necessity to analyze the relationship between the university’s English language learning center for international students and PTD. No ELLSA

should ever have to endure the hardship that Milena so triumphantly defeated. In a way, she was punished because of her initial lack of English proficiency. The classes that did not count towards her PTD should have contributed towards her eligibility and ultimately towards her degree. I would pose the following question to any institution that does not wish to discuss a potential change in how an English language center's courses apply towards any international student's degree: *What makes an English Language Learner who is taking English proficiency coursework different from another student doing the same thing in another language?*

I understand that these other students, possibly non-ELL domestic students taking a language other than English, do not need the language to become operational within their current environment, but why should a language class not count as such? I would hope that the answer does not lie in monetary benefits to the university coming from international students attending English language center courses, but I fear that I may be mistaken in being so optimistic.

With the strong notion of the aforementioned institutional barrier brought to light, I would also suggest some easier, more directly impactful resources for the academic support staff that aims to aide ELLSAs in their English language proficiency. Not all NCAA affiliated institutions have sections in tutor handbooks that provide tutors insight into teaching ELLs. My institution did not have anything in this regard until my employer approached me and asked me to develop a section dedicated to ELL education. I was happy to be of service to them and I am proud of the direction they have been taking to improve the overall experience of the ELLSA community. A section such as this could be included in tutor handbooks across the NCAA affiliated institutions and would hopefully raise awareness about the population in general. Additionally, a section like this could also help academic support staff develop an even deeper understanding of the population with which they are working.

Simply including an additional section in a handbook is only half of the work. Institutions must provide their tutors with training that goes beyond explaining or reiterating NCAA rules of compliance. As at my institution, the academic leaders in tutoring centers across the nation should be providing their tutors with interactive, real-world applicable educational development training sessions. Tutors should be encouraged to ask questions about teaching practices and should be provided with the means to understand deeper insight into the lives of the students they are teaching. This will not only increase tutor impact during tutoring sessions, but I believe it will also provide incentive to dedicated tutors who also wish to hone their teaching skills. Furthermore, tutors can act as ambassadors to people and groups outside of athletic departments and could possibly help suppress the ever-detrimental athlete stigma.

The notion of dedicated tutors brings me to my next suggestion. The tutoring pools within athletics programs should be analyzed and new ways to recruit even better, more effective tutors should be assessed. Athletics programs should align themselves with their institution's School of Education or affiliated Teacher's College. English as a Second Language and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language programs are common and can be tapped into for assistance in educating ELLSAs. Graduate students in these kinds of programs, especially those who are not fortunate enough to receive graduate teaching assistantships or research positions, are excellent resources. Employing these people is not only beneficial for ELLSAs' educational experiences. This kind of opportunity is also beneficial for graduate students in developing their teaching skills, research skills, and assisting in funding the ever-increasing costs of graduate school.

Furthermore, the entire field of ESL/TESOL can benefit from research coming from this environment. Research can be conducted alongside instruction, but considerations should be

made to secure the central focus on assisting ELLSAs with their academic needs. An example could involve the development of internal, formative assessment mechanisms that will help track ELLSA English language proficiency progress. I have personally developed and implemented some successful, formative assessments at my institution that both educate ELLSAs on their surrounding environment and help tutors understand where individuals who take the assessment may need additional assistance. Assessments such as these can definitely be further developed and implemented at other institutions.

The alignment with a School of Education or an affiliated Teacher's College is not only limited to accessing to a well versed, educated pool of employees. Athletics programs can also benefit from faculty input which could aim to improve the type of educational support provided to ELLSAs and the greater student-athlete population. Faculty support is not only potentially beneficial for improving academic levels of achievement, but can also lead to a better understanding and relationship between student-athletes, university instructors, and the greater campus community. According to both the literature and the self-reporting of the ELLSAs in this study, there is often a disconnect between student-athletes and, in particular, university instructors. Some seem to be supportive and understanding of the responsibilities of student-athletes and others react seemingly unsympathetically. This has certainly been seen in this study. I honestly believe that an increase in faculty input and participation in athletic departments' academic endeavors would be beneficial for student-athletes, the university, and the overall image of athletic programs in general.

On a final note, I often wonder how many of the domestic student-athletes have a different first language than English. Knowing this statistic would potentially speak to American

ELLs' social mobility or lack thereof. The NCAA could assist social scientists in gathering this data to investigate US-domestic ELLs.

### *Responsible Campus Integration*

Bolstering support groups in responsible ways is essential mostly in regards to the academic success of ELLSAs. In addition to these heightened levels of support, athletic departments can also increase the promotion of a positive social life outside of sport and academic endeavors. This notion of a restricted social life stems from the evident instances, which seem to be universal amongst the survey sample and ethnographic interviews, relating to the lack of ELLSA integration into the greater campus community. While some ELLSAs reported that they have found ways to break into more than just their surrounding athlete counterparts' circles, many have indicated that they do not have the time, resources, or the knowledge about how to branch out to the greater campus community. By finding new ways to integrate the ELLSAs, and student-athletes in general, into the campus community, they will feel more welcome and able to acclimate themselves to their new environment in a way that they personally value and find beneficial.

There are hundreds of student groups at my institution. They all have various levels of involvement requirements and they also represent a highly diverse set of extracurricular activities. Moreover, I would even argue that there is a student group for every kind of student at the university. If a student does not find a group in which they are interested, the ability to start a new group with their interests in mind is absolutely possible. Student groups are only required to consist of four members to become officially established. One of these members must be a graduate student, a member of the university faculty, or a member of the university staff to act as

their advisor. I would highly recommend athletic programs to help their students find ways to reach out to or even form student groups for social purposes outside the realm of athletics.

If athletics programs assist student-athletes in branching out to the greater campus community, then they will have representatives who can actively work towards breaking down the athlete stigma. Currently, the schedules of student-athletes are so demanding that many of them do not even have the chance to actively respond to the myriad of uninformed criticisms consistently launched against them in the media and around campus. If they were provided the opportunity to become integrated, their non-athlete peers would be able to get to know them and will hopefully understand the complexities of their situations. I understand that a request to reduce the amount of time spent on athletic training will not be well received by many people, but ELLSAs, and student-athletes in general, should be able to enjoy life as young adults in college.

### *Limitations*

No study is perfect, nor should one ever be denoted as such. This notion is even truer in regards to under investigated populations and subject matter. The main limitations in this study regard some elements within the data collection process, a lack of resources and athletic department/institutional participation, some shortfalls pertaining to the items within the survey (changes reflected in APPENDIX A), and potential forms of bias within the ethnographic interviews.

The potential bias due to the method of data collection discussed in the previous section is very limited. I do not believe the study lost any value due to this potential bias. Nonetheless, a misstep in the fourth section of the survey needs to be corrected for future research. The survey failed to ask about a vital component from within the ELLSAs' community of learners; namely,



their teammates. The ethnographic interviews, however, did provide insight into three ELLSAs' feelings towards their teammates. The interviews and a positive working relationship with these students, however, definitely indicates that they do feel supported by their teammates.

The fifth section of the survey was also too limited in scope, especially considering the fact that one of the ELLSAs reported not getting enough sleep. Without a category or the possibility to write in a response, the survey could be considered somewhat incomplete. This could be adjusted in the survey by adding a free response line (e.g. 'other').

My personal resources were relatively limited and I was fortunate to have some assistance from my athletics program in this endeavor. Limitations occurred especially when dealing with how to best reach out to the ELLSAs. Originally, I had planned on surveying the ELLSA population twice during the semester, but busy travel schedules and academic calendars did not allow for this to be possible. Surveying the population once again next semester could provide more insight into the results from this study and would act as more reliable, longitudinal evidence.

In addition to working with my athletics program's academic support, I also reached out via email to academic support staff members from 38 of the more sizable Division I, NCAA affiliated athletic departments across the various conferences. Those included therein are as follows: Pacific-12 Conference, BIG Ten Conference, Mountain West Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Southeastern Conference, Sun Belt Conference, and all BIG 12 Conference institutions. Only two athletic departments responded to my outreach efforts. One of them did not wish to participate in surveying their population but did want to hear about the results from this study. Another expressed wanting to participate in the survey and has been able to collect data from a few of their ELLSAs so far.

Due to time constraints with the submission deadlines required by my university, their results were not able to be included in this study. Nonetheless, I will be analyzing their results and sharing the findings of this study with their athletic department. I am proud of the initiative they have taken in responding and assisting me in this study.

Finally, the ethnographic interviews provided some of the most valuable insight in this study and I can state with confidence that the mixed methods of this study proved beneficial. Nonetheless, more interview sessions with the same students and/or more interviews with different students could have been helpful. While the surveys did cover 41.6% of the desired population, the ethnographic interviews only covered about 12.5% of the estimated population. Further studies could find ways to expand participation. Doing so would provide additional insight into the desires and lifestyles of the student-athlete community.

### *Conclusion*

Based on the surveys and the interviews, I can sufficiently conclude that there are many aspects to this institution's positive treatment of and on-going support for its ELLSA population. Evidence for the sound presence of mentors and instructors within the ELLSA's community of learners was accounted for in overwhelmingly high levels of self-reported confidence across the support groups. The implementation of support services such as these creates a positive learning environment that should be further developed and studied. Practical-use methods of implementation in other learning environments could also be developed from a deeper understanding of an ELLSA's typically one-on-one educational setting.

Considerations for protecting and providing adequate support for the ELLSA population are a serious matter. Additionally, the NCAA and their affiliated athletic departments need to continue responding to their own call of being student-centered. Without continued research and

data collection about this population, no one will be able to fully ensure fair treatment of ELLSAs, be able to find grounded methods for improving a given program, and assist these young adults in excelling personally, socially, academically, and athletically.

Furthermore and on a much larger scale, there are too many conversations about “the arms race” that is the National Collegiate Athletic Association. If humanity has ever understood anything about war, we have discovered that, in putting our arms down, we can foster an environment where learning, growing, and rebuilding can thrive into a brighter tomorrow. If collegiate athletic programs in the United States collectively decided to do so, I believe the guns (e.g. money and win-loss records) could be packed away and collegiate athletics will be a place “where the student is always the priority” (Mark Emmert, N.d. NCAA.org). Athletic departments, and more specifically the NCAA, owe all student-athletes a tranquil, productive learning environment, which can assist them in becoming the people they wish to be.

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**APPENDIX A: Survey Form (Revised)**

<b>SECTION ONE</b>						
<i>Demographic information collected in this section: Age, Sex, Nationality, L1-L4, Time at Institution, Time in US, Time in other ENGL-dominant country (where?), Living Arrangements, Number/Nationality of Roommates</i>						
<b>SECTION TWO: ENGLISH LANGUAGE</b>						
	<i>Please circle your answer,</i>					
<b>While at your university, how important is it to...</b>	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Not Very Important</i>	<i>Not Important</i>	
...speak English well?	1	2	3	4	5	
...be able to understand other speakers?	1	2	3	4	5	
...read well in English?	1	2	3	4	5	
...write well in English?	1	2	3	4	5	
...improve your overall English language skills?	1	2	3	4	5	
...earn a degree/graduate from university?	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>SECTION THREE: SOCIALIZING</b>						
<b>How often do you socialize with...</b>	<i>Very Often</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Does not apply.</i>
... people whose first language is English?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
... people whose first language is not English?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
... student-athletes whose first language is English?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
... student-athletes whose first language is not English?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
... people who speak your first language?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

**APPENDIX A: Survey Form (Revised; Continued)**

<b>SECTION FOUR: SUPPORT GROUPS</b>						
<b>Overall I feel supported by...</b>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Does not apply.</i>
<i>...teammates</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<i>...coaches</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<i>...tutors</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<i>...academic advisors</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<i>...university staff</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<i>...university instructors/professors</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>SECTION FIVE: TIME AND EFFORT</b>						
<b>I have enough time to...</b>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
<i>...feel dedicated to my sport.</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<i>...socialize.</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<i>...study/learn.</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<i>...be by myself.</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<i>...improve my English language skills.</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<i>...be involved with student groups/clubs outside of Athletics.</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<i>OTHER (please write in the space provided):</i>						



**APPENDIX B: Ethnographic Interview Questions**

- 1) When thinking about listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English, which do you view as most important? Why?
- 2) If someone has difficulties learning English, what would you suggest to them?
- 3) What is some advice you would give to ELLSAs before coming to the US, when they first arrive, and then for the duration (long-term advice) of their time at the university?
- 4) What is your main purpose for coming to this institution? Has that reason changed over time?
- 5) Are you here to earn a degree? Why (not)?
- 6) What has been one of the most difficult tasks for you here so far?
- 7) You will need to interact with many different people to be successful in college. Which people have been the most helpful so far during your time at the university?
- 8) I have seen some student-athletes' schedules and they seem very busy.
  - a) What's important to you in life?
  - b) Do you feel as though you have enough time for the things that are important to you?
  - c) Potential follow up questions: Check if there is any additional, more specific information pertaining to sport success, social life, studying, alone time, or improve English language skills.
- 9) Many student-athletes on the survey said that they do not have time to interact with organizations outside of the athletics department.
  - a) Are you involved with any organizations or clubs outside of the athletics department?
  - b) Do you want to be? Why not?/Which ones? Do you know what's out there or how to get involved?
- 10) What could your athletic department do or change to help you better succeed?
  - a) Potential follow up questions: Check for more specific information across the following levels: personally, academically, socially, and athletically.

**APPENDIX C: ELLSA Survey Administration Instructions**

If you are planning on using survey items from this study, please contact the author before survey administration (Email: [pantaleon@ku.edu](mailto:pantaleon@ku.edu) or [educateschoollearn@gmail.com](mailto:educateschoollearn@gmail.com)).

If there are any questions or concerns, please get in touch with the author at your earliest convenience.

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**APPENDIX D: ELLSA English Language Formative Assessment Tool**

If you would like to implement the ELLSA English Language formative assessment tool in your program, please contact the author for more information (Email: [pantaleon@ku.edu](mailto:pantaleon@ku.edu) or [educateschoollearn@gmail.com](mailto:educateschoollearn@gmail.com)).

If there are any questions or concerns, please get in touch with the author at your earliest convenience.

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